



August 28, 2008

## Self-reliance is admirable, but so is seeking help

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Iowans are renowned as self-sufficient and family-focused. They lend helping hands to their neighbors without a second thought. They're good to their families and good to their neighbors. Because of these core values, Iowans are well-suited to recover from this year's flood and storm disasters.

But there's a limit to self-reliance. Iowans have been stretched to the limits in terms of the amount of stress anyone could be expected to endure. In the past few months, individuals and families have been pulled from community roots, employees have lost jobs, children have lost their schools, and many have no homes to return to.

We have helped one another recover from the physical part of the disaster. Now we must also help one another recover from the stress.

Those of us who help individuals deal with mental-health issues in general and during times of disaster recognize several phases of recovery. The "heroic phase" usually occurs during and immediately after a disaster, when survivors expend a great deal of energy helping others survive and recover. I have witnessed countless examples of courage, generosity and support from Iowans in this phase. People focus on the immediate needs of those who are in danger and pitch in to help.

Shortly after comes a "honeymoon phase" that can last six months, when those who have survived have a strong sense of having shared and lived through a catastrophic experience with others. Iowans may have felt supported and encouraged by official agencies that promised assistance. We've seen the cleanup process begin, with anticipation that more help will be available.

But then the "disillusionment phase" starts. If promises of aid are not fulfilled as expected, strong feelings of anger, resentment and bitterness may occur. There may be a gradual loss of the "shared community" as survivors concentrate on rebuilding on their own. People may feel isolated and communities may become divided and hostile.

Finally, the "reconstruction phase" begins, as survivors regain control and rebuild their lives.

Our job is to help people reach the reconstruction phase. Some people can get there themselves. Here are some suggestions: Accept the reality of the loss, allow yourself and other family members to feel sadness over what has happened, acknowledge that possessions lost are gone forever, put closure to the situation and move on. Do not continue to let the loss take its physical, emotional or spiritual toll. Last but not least, have faith in better times to come.

Other people need additional help. That's where neighborliness comes in. If you or a member of your family or one of your neighbors is having trouble coping, seek help or contact Project Recovery Iowa through the Iowa Concern Hotline. You may need just a sympathetic voice or some educational materials, but one-to-one, confidential counseling is also available.

I know it can be awkward to do this. If it helps, clip a copy of this article and take it next door. And let them know it's OK to be a little less self-reliant.